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“Sprezzatura”: The influence of Studied Nonchalance on Fashion

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Introduction. A Italian term, Sprezzatura is often translated into “nonchalance” (Castiglione, 1959). Renaissance aristocrat, Baldassare Castiglione, first introduced the concept of “Sprezzatura” in his book *Il Cortegiano* (1528). In his work, Castiglione defined successful qualities of ideal Renaissance gentlemen through dialogue between courtiers and ladies sitting around the Duchess of Urbino for four evenings.

The courtiers were expected to show mastery in a variety of diverse areas such as expert knowledge of humanities and art and to have a refined demeanor, a good voice, as well as physical and martial skills (Castiglione, 1967). The well-rounded courtiers had to do everything with Sprezzatura, “effortless mastery” (Burke, 1996). Sprezzatura therefore refers to the paradoxical concepts of artful artlessness or studied nonchalance (D’Epiro & Pinkowish, 2001).

Origin of Sprezzatura. The concept of Sprezzatura is comparable to Cicero’s ideal orator (De Oratore, 1963). Cicero stated that an ideal orator should be not only an expert of rhetorical techniques but also of moral principles and laws. The excellent orator should persuade audiences to believe his claims without appearing to make an effort to do so, which was described as “studied nonchalance” and “careful negligence” (Posner, 2004). Castiglione expanded Cicero’s rhetoric style into every aspect of courtier’s behaviors.

Influence of Sprezzatura. Sprezzatura significantly influenced Italian cultures from the birth of university to custom made cars (D’Epiro & Pinkowish, 2001). *Il Cortegiano* (1528) was one of the most widely published books, with more than sixty editions spreading to powerful European courts such as Spain, France, and England. Sprezzatura continued to influence the 17th century European literature emphasizing gracefulness, the 18th century formulation of ideal English gentleman (Posner, 1999), and the 19th century modernized tradition of gentlemen (Cunningham & Leich, 2006).

Castiglione defined Sprezzatura in the discourse of fashion; he recommended that the courtier always present himself in a charming way without appearing to be fashion conscious. Sprezzatura also included dressing for occasion, wearing appropriate colors, and the importance of creating style in an aesthetic and political context (Paulicelli, 2004). This created a foundation of dress codes in entire European cultures over the course of centuries.

The epitome of Sprezzatura was demonstrated in the Italians through their taste in fashion. A renowned men’s fashion icon, Gianni Agnelli, exemplified Sprezzatura. Agnelli liked to mismatch and neglected common rules of fashion such as wearing high hiking boots with his impeccable Italian bespoke suit. Agnelli scrupulously chose his outfits but then carefully

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mismatched an accessory or undone a last detail in order to create a look that appeared to effortless. Agnelli's outfitting process is a perfect example of careful negligence of Sprezzatura. Italian eccentric styling has been spread men's fashion across the world (Hartman, 2011).

In the 21st century Sprezzatura has transformed into modern ideals of effortless cool. Author of the famous blog The Sartorialist, Scott Schuman, reported that men completed their polished looks with indifference as demonstrated in styling techniques like the bottom panel of a tie hanging lower than top panel or luxury suit accompanied with vintage accessories. Behind the nonchalance looks, what is unseen is the time taken for men to pull their ties multiple times or pull an eccentric sweater together with their classic double breasted tailored suit.

The studied nonchalance is not limited to men's styling. Evidence suggests that Sprezzatura spread on women's styling as well. Creative director Peter Copping, of Nina Ricci, presented Fall/winter collection, the press acclaimed his collection for "imperfect glamour" ("Paris Fashion Week", 2011). Nina Ricci's signature looks of mademoiselle chic appeared a bit unpolished: a crumbled black silk blend skirt was styled with a perfect silk charmeuse blouse. A model's hair was slightly undone, which was carefully planned not to look like she did her hair. This well-practiced naturalness in hair styles are widely seen at designers' collections such as Cynthia Rowley and Marc Jacobs.

The paradoxical notion of Sprezzatura has changed a way that individuals dress as well as look at styles. Similar to what Cicero pointed out, Sprezzatura often engages both wearer and audience in a state of mutual deception (Posner, 1999). Audiences are carefully led to see the opposite of a wearer's hard working but they conceivably share what the wearer desires to be seen at the same time. As the interaction of Sprezzatura between wearer and audience increases, it is interesting to understand how the studied nonchalance would evolve in the future.

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